

# Lean Kaizen streamlines TRL application process

**W**hen many employees hear the words “continuous improvement” process they say to themselves, “Here we go again.” Over the years, Iowa state government has been involved with numerous improvement processes, with varying degrees of success. One improvement tool now in action in the Iowa DOT’s Motor Vehicle Division (MVD) is the Kaizen process, supported by the Iowa Department of Management’s (DOM) Office of Lean Enterprise.

Kaizen is Japanese for “change for the better.” To be successful, DOM’s website states the work process being examined should be large-volume, follow the same steps each time and be a core business activity. Mark Lowe, MVD director, says his group chose the temporary restricted license (TRL) issuance system to go under the microscope in Kaizen sessions Dec. 6-10.

Lowe said, “We chose the TRL process because there have been changes to the law recently and we knew the process wasn’t working as well as we would like. Kaizen is a tool, a way to look at a process and find ways to make it better by breaking down and examining each element. With assistance from a facilitator from DOM, we assembled a team of 12 people; four that work directly with the process, four that have some knowledge of TRL and four from outside the process or customers of the TRL process. This gave a wide perspective to the week-long meeting that pulls apart the existing way of doing business and then rebuilds it, with the goal of removing bottlenecks and inefficiencies.”

Brandie McCuen-Burgos, public service supervisor 3 in Driver Services, was a TRL process team member. She said, “When I first received the meeting notice for the Kaizen TRL process improvement, I had no idea what Kaizen was. I Googled it and found out that it basically meant to improve a process. That gave me a basic understanding of what I was getting into. We had a pre-event meeting to give us an overview of what we were supposed to do and to outline objectives. I have never been through a Kaizen or Lean process, so I did not have any preconceived thoughts. Now that I have been through the process, I feel it is very beneficial, especially because we are going to have to find ways to get our processing times somewhere close to where they were before the recent retirements, without adding employees.”

The TRL process team set lofty goals, reducing lead time by 50 percent, from 30 to 15 days, and reducing the number of steps in the process by half. McCuen-Burgos said, “The only way to find improvements is to actually map in great detail all the steps it takes to do something and find out where the delays are and if there really are unnecessary steps that can be eliminated.”

“When I first heard that I was going to be attending the Kaizen project, I had no idea what I was getting into,” said Dawn Hackleman, administrative assistant 2 in Driver Services.



*Dawn Hackleman, administrative assistant 2, works through the current TRL process on paper as part of a Kaizen exercise.*

After our pre-meeting, I was very skeptical about how we were going to improve the TRL process. I’m all for change for the better; it’s just often difficult getting others on board after we figure out what we think we can accomplish. Working with updating the old TRL process because of the law change and then reworking those changes through the Kaizen process, I saw room for improvement. I just didn’t know how we were going to go about accomplishing the streamlining.”

At the end of the Kaizen session, which in this case, took 4½ working days, there was a plan in place to change the process right away. Lowe said, “Management buy-in is essential to make this work. We have to trust that the team members are doing a great job of making the process more efficient and effective. Quick implementation of the improvements they find is vital to continued success. On our team, it was very helpful to have an information technology team member so we could make sure the changes the team wanted to make were able to be accomplished.”

Hackleman said, “Going through the week-long process was tough at times. But when you are forced to step back and think of ways to improve the process with several other people involved, you can come up with some good results. We had some great solutions that I think we can implement.”

Another key to success is follow-up. Lowe said, “While the improvements are identified during the Kaizen sessions, the real work begins at implementation and follow through. The team will meet again periodically over the next year to see how the TRL process is working and make further adjustments as necessary.”

With the completion of one Kaizen improvement under their belts, Lowe says MVD is looking forward to two or three more projects in 2011. “It was encouraging to see the process unfold. By the end, even the skeptics were on board. With the assistance of DOM, we look forward to continuing to review our processes in this pragmatic way.”